

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 PC-01 AID-05 DHA-05 CU-04

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FM AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6637

INFO AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMCONSUL DURBAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L JOHANNESBURG 2323

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: SF, PINS, PINT

SUBJECT: SSRC RESPONDS TO SAG SOWETO SCHOOL TAKE-OVER

1. SUMMARY: THE SOWETO STUDENTS REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL (SSRC) HAS RELEASED A STATEMENT CALLING ON STUDENTS TO BOYCOTT THE TAKEOVER OF TOWNSHIP SECONDARY SCHOOLS, BUT IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH TWO SSRC LEADERS, CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION AND CONCERN EMERGED ABOUT FUTURE COURSES OF ACTION. END SUMMARY.

2. THE SOWETO STUDENTS REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL, STUNG RECENTLY BY THE SAG DECISION TO TAKE-OVER TOWNSHIP SECONDARY SCHOOLS, AS WELL AS THE HASTY EXIT OF CHAIRMAN TROFOMO SONO, ISSUED A STATEMENT CALLING ON STUDENTS TO BOYCOTT SOWETO SCHOOLS WHEN THEY REOPEN UNDER BANTU ADMINISTRATION SUPERVISION. THE STATEMENT READ, IN PART, "SO THEN, THE STUDENTS OF SOWETO WHO WERE BOYCOTTING POISONOUS BANTU EDUCATION LESSONS ARE PREPARED THIS TIME TO BOYCOTT THE STATE SCHOOLS BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT STATE STUDENTS BUT
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COMMUNITY STUDENTS".

3. PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN TWO SSRC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND CONOFFS INDICATED, HOWEVER, CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION AND SOME DISAGREEMENT OVER FUTURE COURSE OF ACTION. THE SSRC MEMBERS SAID, WHILE WARNING NO SPECIFIC DECISIONS HAD YET BEEN MADE DUE TO A LACK OF CONSENSUS (AND WARNING THAT NEWSPAPER

REPORTS OF SSRC ACTIONS WERE, TO A DEGREE, PREMATURE), THAT THE STUDENTS WOULD NEVER BECOME "STATE STUDENTS" AND WOULD NOT SUCCUMB TO THIS LATEST SAG MANEUVER. ADDITIONALLY, THEY CLAIMED THE SSRC WOULD ATTEMPT TO EXPAND BOYCOTT OF BANTU EDUCATION SCHOOLS TO ALL PARTS OF SOUTH AFRICA, MAKING STUDENT BOYCOTT A NATIONAL EFFORT. THE PURPOSE OF THIS STRATEGY WAS TO EXERT PRESSURE ON THE WHOLE SYSTEM IN AN ATTEMPT TO LOOSEN THE SCREWS ON THE SOWETO S HOOL SYSTEM.

4. IN REMARKS ABOUT SSRC LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS, THEY STATED THAT THE SSRC HAS NOT SELECTED A NEW CHAIRMAN AND WILL NOT REVEAL HIS NAME EVEN WHEN CHOSEN "BECAUSE TO DO SO WILL ONLY CAUSE THE POLICE TO CONCENTRATE ON HIM AND HINDER HIS EFFECTIVENESS". THE TWO STUDENTS BOTH SEEMED TO FEEL TROFOMO SONO HAD LET THE SSRC DOWN BY FLEEING, UNANNOUNCED, TO BOTSWANA. THEY FELT SONO WAS NOT UNDER UNDUE PRESSURE AND HAD YET TO ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING AS SSRC CHAIRMAN. THEY, IN TURN, PRAISED SONO'S PREDECESSOR SECHABA MONTISI AS "THE BEST LEADER WE EVER HAD", MAKING SONO APPEAR EVEN MORE UNFAVORABLE BY COMPARISON. BOTH INDICATED THAT THE SSRC WAS UNDER CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE AND INQUIRED ABOUT POSSIBLE ASSISTANCE (FINANCIAL AND/OR SCHOLARSHIPS) FOR SSRC MEMBERS WHO WERE FORCED TO "BE ON THE RUN".

5. COMMENT: THE CONFUSION AND INDECISION AMONG THE STUDENTS (IN PARTICULAR THE SSRC) AS A RESULT OF THE SAG MOVE TO TAKE
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OVER SCHOOLS SEEMS TO CONFIRM EARLIER STUDENT FEARS THAT THIS MAY EFFECTIVELY HAMPER MILITANT STUDENT ACTIVITY. THE SSRC, ON THE ONE HAND, HAS BRAVELY DECLARED WAR ON THE NEW SYSTEM AND THREATENS TO EXPAND ITS CAMPAIGN AGAINST BANTU EDUCATION TO ALL TOWNSHIPS THROUGHOUT SOUTH AFRICA. ON THE OTHER, THE SSRC ACKNOWLEDGES THAT, WITH THE SCHOOLS NOW DENIED TO THEM, ORGANIZATIONAL DIFFICULTIES WILL INCREASE AND POLICE PRESSURE ON THE LEADERSHIP VERGES ON THE UNBEARABLE. FURTHERMORE, THERE IS THE UNDENIABLE FACT THAT MANY STUDENTS (AND NOTABLY TEACHERS) ARE PRIVATELY SIGHING RELIEF THAT TOWNSHIP CLASSES MAY REOPEN, ALTHOUGH STILL UNHAPPY WITH BANTU EDUCATION. IF SOWETO SCHOOL AUTHORITIES AND SOWETO POLICE COMMANDER VISSER MAKE ANY HEADWAY WITH THEIR PROMISES TO REPLACE THE BANTU EDUCATION CURRICULUM WITH THE TRANSVAAL EDUCATION ONE, THEN STUDENTS WILL BE EVEN MORE INCLINED TO RETURN TO CLASSES.

6. ANOTHER FACTOR IN THE SSRC DILEMMA IS THEIR FEAR THAT, DUE TO THE REQUIREMENT THAT ALL STUDENTS "REGISTER", THEY ARE EFFECTIVELY BANNED FROM TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS. THE POLICE WILL MOST PROBABLY HAVE LISTS OF STUDENTS INVOLVED IN

"SUBVERSIVE"

ACTIVITIES AND WOULD NATURALLY USE THE REREGISTRATION PROCESS TO PICK UP THE ONES THEY WANT. THUS, ANY SSRC STUDENT OR SYMPATHIZER KNOWN OR WHO FEARS HE MAY BE KNOWN (AS MOST APPARENTLY FEAR) WILL BE RELUCTANT TO SUBMIT TO REREGISTRATION.

7. FINALLY, AS THE SAG MOVE TO TAKE OVER TOWNSHIP SECONDARY SCHOOLS SEEMS TO SUIT THE GOVERNMENT'S PURPOSES SO ADMIRABLY, ONE WONDERS WHY IT WAS NOT EMPLOYED BEFORE. OF COURSE, WHILE IT IS A LEGITIMATE EFFORT TO GET SCHOOLS BACK TO NORMAL, IT ALSO AUGMENTS THEIR CAPACITY TO COMBAT THE REBELLIOUS STUDENTS. THERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT DESPITE THE SHORT TERM

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PROBLEMS THE STUDENTS MAY FACE AS A RESULT OF THIS SAG MOVE, THE STUDENTS WILL NOT BE INTIMIDATED IN THE LONG RUN AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE BURR UNDER THE SADDLE.

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